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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Israeli Elections

[1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All print media led with the last election polls:
Kadima trails behind Likud by one to three Knesset seats; a swelling
Yisrael Beiteinu comes in third, ahead of and the Labor Party. But

when it comes to forming a coalition, Likud still has a clear edge over its rival: Even in the unlikely event of Avigdor Lieberman choosing to throw his support behind Kadima chairwoman Tzipi Livni rather than Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu, the only coalition Livni could form would be highly unstable. -- and without Lieberman, she has no coalition at all. The media forecast low voter turnout, particularly among Israeli Arabs.

HaQaretz reported that PM Ehud Olmert has been making great efforts in recent weeks to clinch a deal with Hamas for the release of Gilad Shalit, and recently said privately that he is determined to try to bring Shalit home before he leaves office. However, DM Ehud Barak told Channel 2-TV last week that he believes there is a better prospect of bringing Shalit home after the elections than before. But Thursday he seemed to backtrack, saying the results of the military campaign in the Gaza Strip "can help us accelerate the decision-making process to bring Shalit home. It will require tough and painful decisions, but I believe there will be cabinet members who will do these things."

Meretz Chairman Haim Oron (QJumesQ) was quoted as saying in an interview with HaQaretz that the Qtwo-state solution is on its last legs.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Radikha Coomaraswamy, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict, told the newspaper that the UN is ready to address HamasQs use of children as human shields.

Israel Radio reported that Israel is freeing the 18 passengers and crewmembers of the Lebanese ship the Israeli Navy commandeered yesterday. Four passengers will remain in custody. The radio reported that Lebanon is urging the UN Security Council to force Israel to release the ship. In another development, HaQaretz reported that Greece has been holding a ship bound for Iran for over a month because its cargo was found to contain components for surface-to-surface missiles.

Israel Radio reported that this morning two rockets were launched at Israel from Gaza.

Israel Radio reported that yesterday Secretary of State Hilary Clinton thanked Olmert for transferring 175 million shekels (around \$44 million) to Palestinian banks. The radio reported that the Kibbutz Movement is sending three truck loads of aid to Gaza. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited research by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs that the PA finances HamasQs military with aid money from the U.S. and other countries.

Col. Alain Fougeras, the head of the European Union Border Assistance Mission, which is in charge of monitoring activity at the Rafah crossing, was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that keeping the crossing open is critical and that security protocols must be signed this time.

The Jerusalem Post cited an analysis of the Gaza operation by Anthony H. Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies that concluded that Israel did not violate the laws of war and made marked improvements in its fighting capability during the recent military operation against Hamas in Gaza, yet the gains from the conflict in the long term remain uncertain,. The Jerusalem Post quoted an Israeli defense official involved in international efforts to stop IranQs race toward nuclear power as saying that a victory by Muhammad Khatami in the upcoming Iranian presidential elections would likely derail that process.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the Israeli NGO BQTselem as saying yesterday in its annual report that Israel has been holding 42 Palestinians in administrative detention for more than two years.

Leading media reported that, during a lecture at Stockholm University on Wednesday, Israeli Ambassador to Sweden Benny Dagan was hit by a protesterQs shoe while defending the IDFQs actions in Gaza.

Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that the window of opportunity for military action against Iran is small and that the next Israeli PM would do well to appoint a counterpart to deal with U.S. envoy

George Mitchell.

Yediot reported on a meeting that took place yesterday between war orphans from Gaza and Sderot children.

Yediot reported that one year ago Israeli agents used intelligence gathered by the U.S. to assassinate chief Hizbullah operative Imad Mughniyah in Damascus.

Yediot reported that yesterday Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann signed an MOU with the U.S. on cooperation regarding the enforcement of child alimony payments: the U.S. authorities will deal with Israelis residing in the U.S who do not pay child support Q and the other way around.

HaQaretz cited the results of a poll taken yesterday among Palestinians: 46% believe that Hamas won in Gaza.

I1. Israeli Elections:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIsrael's next coalition government needs to put defining this country's red lines high on its agenda. Our negotiators can then take those parameters, reflecting a national consensus, to the negotiating table.

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QThe moment young people, secular people or Arabs, stay away from the polls, they are distorting the outcome of the election to their own detriment.

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: QA 20-percent abstention equals dozens of seats, which could neutralize Liebermanism. Tzipi and Netanyahu would do well to join forces in a new government that will tackle both the problems of peace and the demon that is turning the country into a bastion of apartheid.

HaQaretz publisher Amos Schocken wrote in his newspaper: QMeretz's position during the war in the south is no reason not to vote for it.... For its responsible and balanced behavior Meretz is now paying a high price, although this behavior should actually have been rewarded by a large number of votes.

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: QNetanyahu is the man leading the resistance of public opinion that is gushing to the right. Thus, until the job is done, Likud must be strengthened in order to make a true makeover possible.

Prominent playwright Yehoshua Sobol wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QAs a result of the never-ending conflict and the blows we have repeatedly inflicted and received, we have turned into the mirror image of the Palestinians. They elected Hamas and we are voting for thrombosis in the arteries of peace that wonQt come. Desperation meets desperation.

Block Quotes:

II. "Red Lines"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/6): QWhat guarantee do we have that once a Syria-Israel peace treaty was in place -- and the Golan abandoned -- Damascus-Tehran relations wouldn't revert to normal; that Syria wouldn't continue to give Hamas leaders safe haven; and that it wouldn't go on funneling Hizbullah weapons? Should these doubts prompt red lines?.... Mahmoud Abbas today is still demanding: a total pullback to the 1949 Armistice Lines; the redivision of Jerusalem, and the QreturnQ of millions of refugees, and their descendants, to Israel proper. How are these red lines, representing the most QmoderateQ Palestinian position, to be reconciled with those of Israel's mainstream? It's hard to fathom.... Israeli negotiators thus need to determine whether Palestinian red lines are indelible. It may be that they

aren't. Just four decades ago, the Arabs declared: QNo peace, no negotiation, and no recognitionQ; today Israel has formal peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and is talking to the Palestinians. Israel's next coalition government needs to put defining this country's red lines high on its agenda. Our negotiators can then take those parameters, reflecting a national consensus, to the negotiating table. Benjamin Netanyahu may be best suited to help us identify our red lines at home; Tzipi Livni might be more credible at marketing them abroad. Crystallizing red lines is not about throwing down the gauntlet, it's about knowing our own minds. The danger lies not in revealing our hand, but in not having one.

II. "DonQt Sit at Home"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/6): QFor 50 years, voter turnout in Israel was extremely high, at about 80 percent. Over the last decade, however, it has dropped, and in the last election it hit a worrying low of 63 percent. This decline in voter participation harms democracy and undermines the government's legitimacy.... The moment young people, secular people or Arabs, stay away from the polls, they are distorting the outcome of the election to their own detriment and essentially strengthening all the candidates and parties they oppose. And in this election, this message seems especially important -- because everyone who votes with his feet, everyone who abstains, will be strengthening Lieberman. Once every three years (that has been the average recently), we are asked to take our fate into our own hands and support some party or another. This is not a major effort. Election Day is a national holiday. We have a not inconsiderable choice of 33 different lists, of which about half have a reasonable chance of making it into the Knesset. It is very important that the decision be made by as many people as possible -- because it is important that, insofar as possible, the results reflect the will of the nation, and not just the will of those who bothered to get out and vote.

III. "The Princess and Ivan the Terrible"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (2/6): QTzipi Livni is not Sharon, but she wrote the party platform at his ranch, and was his loyal helpmate all along. When she won the Kadima party nomination for prime minister, the public greeted her victory with approval and optimism. To her credit, let it be said that long before Lieberman popped up with his demands to take away the citizenship of a million and a half Israeli Arabs, and Netanyahu tried to rebrand the Likud as a centrist party, Livni supported the establishment of a unity government with Likud and Labor on the grounds that the left Qisn't so left anymore and the right isn't so right.Q A 20-percent abstention equals dozens of seats, which could neutralize Liebermanism. Tzipi and Netanyahu would do well to join forces in a new government that will tackle both the problems of peace and the demon that is turning the country into a bastion of apartheid. Lieberman, like [the late extremist Rabbi Meir] Kahane, must remain outside.

IV. "IQm Voting Meretz"

HaQaretz publisher Amos Schocken wrote in his newspaper (2/6): QMeretz's position during the war in the south is no reason not to vote for it. If anything, it's a badge of honor for the party and its leaders, another one of many reasons to vote for the party in the upcoming elections.... Meretz could have tried to find favor in the eyes of its electorate and express opposition to any military operation. But in the complicated situation of prolonged firing into Israeli territory by Hamas, Meretz did not abandon the residents of the south, even if they are not its natural electorate, and its stance, like the situation, was complex. For its responsible and balanced behavior Meretz is now paying a high price, although this behavior should actually have been rewarded by a large number of votes.

1V. QLikud -Q for a True Makeover

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (2/6): QTuesdayQs vote must express the makeover that has clearly emerged

in Israeli public opinion. The public abandoned en masse the left-centerQs way. It has strenuously opposed the Olmert governmentQs policy and the line that Sharon led since disengagement. The person who extricated Israeli public opinion from the straits of Kadima and the left was Benjamin Netanyahu - not Avigdor Lieberman, and neither the QorangeQ [settler] leaders. Netanyahu is the man leading the resistance of public opinion that is gushing to the right. Thus, until the job is done, Likud must be strengthened in order to make a true makeover possible.

VI. QIsrael Votes for Thrombosis

Prominent playwright Yehoshua Sobol wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/6): QThe lack of passion for becoming the next prime minister of Israel likely springs from each candidateQs knowledge that he has no real solution for the expected upcoming economic crisis, bankruptcies, and mass dismissals. This brings about a lack of passion to make the voter choose between the quiet man [Netanyahu] and the other woman [Livni], the unpleasant man [Barak], or the one who understands Arabic [Lieberman]. Without passion on the side of the elected officials, how surprising is it that the voters have become indifferent as they have shaken off faith and hope? As a result of the never-ending conflict and the blows we have repeatedly inflicted and received, we have turned into the mirror image of the Palestinians. They elected Hamas and we are voting for thrombosis in the arteries of peace that wonQt come. Desperation meets desperation.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Freelance journalist Sean Gannon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: Q[The] QIrish solution to an Irish problemQ is unthinkable in the case of Hamas.

Block Quotes:

"Resist the Irish Model"

Freelance journalist Sean Gannon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/6): QGiven that U.S. complicity played a major role in legitimizing the spurious Sinn Fein/IRA divide, WashingtonQs insistence that Hamas cannot Qhave one foot in politics and the other in terrorQ should be treated with caution.... The Irish modelQs toleration of a level of terrorist activity in the interests of reaching an agreement was barely supportable in a situation where IRA attacks were by then seldom indiscriminate (limited largely to military and economic targets) and not intended to cause mass slaughter. But this QIrish solution to an Irish problemQ is unthinkable in the case of Hamas, which makes every possible effort to inflict maximum casualties and whose demands are, in any case (unlike those of [Northern Irish] Republicans, not amenable to political accommodation. If Northern Ireland has a lesson for the Middle East conflict it is this: Terrorists will not lay down their weapons until they feel they are left with no choice. Sinn Fein/IRAQs decision to renounce violence was largely the result of exhaustion, and exhaustion born both of repeated military reversals and increasing pressure to end its campaign from elements of its own wider community, from Irish constitutional nationalists and the Catholic Church to the Dublin government and latterly, Irish America. In other words, its effective defeat.

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